

TEMPLON



OMAR BA

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Omar Ba, *Dispersion devant l'impasse*, 2021, acrylic, pencil, oil, Indian ink and Bic pen on canvas, 78 3/4 x 110 1/4". Installation view. Photo: La Kunsthalle Mulhouse / Jean-Jacques Deloitte.

In a turn from figurative painting, Senegalese artist Omar Ba has created one of his most thought-provoking site-specific installations for “Destins Communs,” his exhibition at La Kunsthalle Mulhouse. *Fortification*, 2023, stacks hundreds of woven propylene Swiss Army sandbags up to form a wall. Many are branded with the flags of different countries—a motif in both Ba’s painting and installation practice. The work offers a commentary on the effects of war and conflict, questioning the complex divisions that affect our shared destinies.

Fortification strikes a productive counterpoint to the devastatingly beautiful painting *Dispersion devant l'impasse*, (*Dispersal in the Face of an Impasse*, 2021). Ba’s protagonist spreads his butterfly wings over the canvas in the style of Basquiat’s “Fallen Angel.” Planted around this central actor are tapering stakes, each bearing an image of a person enduring the indignities of immigration and exile. Masked to signify an ongoing pandemic, the winged figure assumes the stance of a protector, or perhaps, given the composition’s crucifixion-scene parallels, a martyr.

Ba’s paintings are busy, with vibrant bursts of blue against brown; They imbue simple details like leaves with an unsettling, ghostly quality. In *Superman and The Constitution II*, 2021, a head of state sits with a legal tome in front of him. Nearly blending into the vegetal surroundings of the background behind him is a faceless woman. As a reference to the abuse of power and the role and participation of women in politics, this is not a particularly convincing work.

With the aesthetic mastery on display in his paintings, Ba, who maintains a studio in Geneva as well as Dakar, prompts us to ponder whether his exploration of nation-state politics transcends a mere suggestion for those in power to improve, perhaps hinting at the influence of Swiss neutrality upon his perspective.